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"Assessing Potential Models of Public Involvement for Forest Planning"
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An Assessment of Potential Models of Public Involvement for Forest Planning on the Bitterroot National Forest

Bitterroot Ecosystem Management Project
Final Report

Project No. INT-96076-RJVA

2 August 1996 to 31 July 1997

Submitted to:
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Introduction

Public participation in national forest planning can help managers 1) determine significant public values and priorities, 2) define critical issues and the appropriate information to address them, 3) identify emerging issues and possibly avoid crises, and 4) determine how well the allocation of forest resources can best meet the public interest. A successful model of public participation for national forest planning must provide consistent and organized direction in identifying why the public is being consulted on specific decisions and how managers should respond to public input. Hence, developing specific criteria by which the effectiveness of public participation can be measured is critical to securing appropriate public involvement and directing relevant managerial responses (U.S. Congress Office of Technology Assessment 1992).

The Bitterroot National Forest is beginning the process of updating its forest plan over the next five years to guide the forest in its management area direction in the next 10 to 15 years. Because much of the recent Forest Service public participation management direction has focused on collaborative or consensus-type group planning efforts, it has been suggested that the Bitterroot National Forest consider the options of a) using existing collaborative groups involved in resource management in the Bitterroot Valley to advise the forest in part or for all of its forest planning effort, b) securing an agreement for an outside group to direct a collaborative group effort for the forest in its forest plan revision, c) creating a unique collaborative group to advise the forest on its forest plan direction, or d) not using a collaborative group model to advise the forest but employing other forms of public involvement for the forest plan effort (BEMRP discussion, 26 June 1996). To assess the degree to which each of these four options can best insure successful public participation in

the Bitterroot National Forest's forest planning efforts, five major criteria of measuring effective public participation have been established by forest staff. These are:

1. **Promoting cooperation** and clarifying people's realistic and idealized expectations of public participation, particularly in the context of the terms "collaboration" and "consensus";
2. **Relating management goals to management practices** on the forest and in local communities and identifying those institutional arrangements that are most effective in implementing land management decisions;
3. **Securing a representative, consultative audience** and characterizing how completely valley consensus/collaborative groups represent local, regional, and national attitudes about land management decisions;
4. **Promoting civil discourse** and recognizing the attributes of, and barriers to, effective public participation;
5. **Adapting communication methods to different information needs and perceptions** of those public groups that may participate in forest planning.

Research Objectives

This project was proposed as an exploratory study to insure that an evaluation of effective public participation models was not only useful for the forest's planning effort but significant for BEMRP's human dimension mission as well. BEMRP's primary human dimension goals are to "increase public awareness and participation in BEMRP goals and objectives and assure that the public continues to be involved 'early-on' in the planning and

development of land management and research projects" (Bitterroot Ecosystem Management Research Proposal Fiscal Year 1994 and 1995). To fulfill both the BEMRP mission of involving the public in land management and research projects and the needs of the forest in meeting the five criteria of effective public participation, we established two major project objectives:

> ***Objective 1: Assess the potential of existing collaborative groups involved in resource management in the Bitterroot Valley to provide effective public involvement in the Bitterroot National Forest forest planning effort.***

Although many groups exist in the Bitterroot region, this project was limited to examining formal community groups involved in land management, land conservation, land use planning, or community development. Groups that were identified at the beginning of the project were the Bitterroot Resource Conservation and Development Area and its associated committees, including the Forestry Assistance Committee, the Bitterroot Water Forum, the Forestry Urban Interface Committee (also known as the Wildland Interface Task Force Group), and the Weed Awareness Committee, as well as the Bitterroot Joint Planning Group. As we describe below (see **Research Methods**), these formal groups were systematically expanded as the project progressed.

> ***Objective 2: Assess the potential of creating a unique collaborative group to provide effective public involvement to the forest on its forest plan direction.***

The perceptions and experiences of outside or "readymade" collaborative groups on neighboring national forests in Region 1 were to be examined to assess their success in meeting the five criteria of effective public participation. Groups were identified by interviewing each major forest management planning staff officer on seven key national forests, i.e., the Clearwater, Nez Perce, Idaho Panhandle, Kootenai, Deerlodge/Beaverhead, Flathead, and Lolo National Forests. The perceptions of forest plan management officers regarding the success at which public participation had been achieved in their forest plan revision efforts were also to be assessed. In particular, perceptions of forest plan management officers regarding the most effective use of a) outside or readymade advisory groups and b) other institutional arrangements, especially county partnerships and tribal liaisons, were identified.

Background

The history of public involvement in the United States dates back to the 1960s when "maximum feasible participation" was the axiom of the War on Poverty. To involve communities in housing, welfare, and education programs, funds were given directly to community boards elected by the citizens they served. However, there was little transfer of public participation from the 1960s to the 1970s from the urban arena to the public domain of natural resource management (Creighton 1995).

Public participation in national forest management was first mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1970, the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) of 1974, and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976. During the 1970s, citizen groups began more frequently asserting their legal rights to

participate fully in national forest management decisions (Selin, Schuett and Carr 1997). Public land management agencies in turn began developing various ways to involve citizens in these decisions under the general rubric of public participation, public involvement, collaborative planning or *collaboration* (Selin, Schuett and Carr 1997). Such collaboration is "a process of joint decision making among key stakeholders of a problem domain about the future of that domain" (Gray 1989). Stakeholders can be considered those people who have individual or collective interests in the problem domain. In general, different approaches to collaboration are most commonly directed at project-level planning, resolving forest conflicts, and promoting a shared vision of future forest conditions (Selin, Schuett and Carr 1997).

Collaborative approaches can be considered as part of either *consultative* or *cooperative* systems of managing common pool resources, including the national forests (Brown and Harris 1992, McKay and Jentoft 1996). Consultative management systems give most decision-making power to the government and are the most common. Government consults with stakeholders through such institutional arrangements as public hearings, citizen review panels, advisory committees, partnerships, or management councils, all of which have varying degrees of limited citizen decision-making authority (Fiorino 1990). Such systems do not necessarily incorporate the knowledge and interests of stakeholders but are often used to legitimize the collaborative process without real stakeholder input into actual resource decisions (Fiorino 1990, McCay and Jentoft 1996).

In contrast, cooperative management systems give most decision-making power to stakeholder user groups. Such systems like resource cooperatives, producer organizations, or tribal departments are more than advisory and give stakeholders real responsibility and authority in resource management. Decisions may be delegated from the federal agency to

local-level institutions or result from a legal recognition of traditional management and rights systems. Power is shared between the stakeholder user groups and the government agency (McKay and Jentoft 1996). These distinctions are essentially the equivalent poles of Arnstein's well-known ladder of public influence that proceeds from the lowest rung of public manipulation to the highest rung of total citizen control (Arnstein 1969).

Consultative Management

In the United States and Canada, stakeholder involvement in resource management occurs through a more representational, i.e., corportist or union, system than in other nations such as Scandinavia where systems of consultation and negotiation between industry and government have occurred for decades. In North America, more individualist public forms of participation are found as reflected in the institution of public hearings and the appointment of individual citizens rather than representatives of organizations to stakeholder groups. How effective such citizens are in decision-making depends on their ability to "speak in one voice" (McKay and Jentoft 1996). In general, consultative management in the United States is much more common that cooperative management. While distinctions can thus be drawn between "conventional" management approaches and "collaborative" ones (e.g., Crowfoot and Wondolleck 1990, Gebhardt 1995, and Susskind and Cruikshank 1987), essentially most public participation forums in this country are consultative in both authority and responsibility (Fiorino 1990, McKay and Jentoft 1996).

One of the most common forms of consultative management in American public resource management are partnerships or "collaborative groups" formed between the public agency and concerned stakeholders. In a collaborative group, public and private members voluntarily promote individual and voluntary actions that collectively will sustain larger

ecosystems (Williams and Eleffson 1997). Such groups are primarily advisory, have no decision-making authority, and vary enormously in size, longevity, membership, and other factors. Some have been in existence for less than one year and others for over a decade. Membership can vary from six to 75 and groups may meet biweekly, monthly, bimonthly, or even annually (Williams and Ellefson 1997). Most collaborative groups are formal because people wish to cooperate, or avoid conflict, in directing the outcomes of resource management on public lands in which they share a common interest.

Consultative Management and Ecosystem Health

One of the advantages of collaborative groups is that they offer a more regionally or ecosystem-based institutional mechanism for providing stakeholder input into agency resource management decisions. Since regional systems offer a compromise between the power of centralized government and the needs of decentralized, local stakeholder groups, ecosystem management is more likely to occur where regional input is high (McKay and Jentoft 1996). For example, when private property owners hold fractured and fragmented forest land holdings and can be persuaded to voluntarily adopt management options for larger blocks, they appear to more willingly accept some regulation or restriction of their property rights in order to improve forest health (Luloff et al. 1996). Voluntary, collaborative groups therefore offer the possibilities of reducing value conflicts between environmental and property rights advocates, achieving a more efficient economy of scale for forest management, and improving forest health through ecosystem management (Luloff et al. 1996).

While collaborative groups may be effective in actually making land management decisions, they may also be successful purely in reflecting a greater number of people contacted or involved in decisions and in determining the approaches for obtaining voluntary

input on those decisions (Carpenter 1995). Although the criteria for success or "effectiveness" of these groups may vary, most observers agree that some measure of both decision making and decision implementation is necessary to improve forest health over a large area of multiple ownerships and agency jurisdictions while meeting legal mandates for public involvement.

Research Methods

To meet the objectives of this study, a qualitative research design was employed. Although quantitative methodology can obtain responses representative of the population through a random sample and control for variables through a standard questionnaire, qualitative methodology can obtain and verify detailed explanations for particular social units such as collaborative groups. A qualitative design was appropriate given the lack of information on the history and achievements of collaborative groups in the region and the resulting lack of hypotheses to test. Since qualitative methodology allows data to be collected and other possible explanations to be eliminated during the investigation rather than before (Maxwell 1996), a qualitative research design was employed in this study.

In August, 1996, an informational memo was sent to key organizational leaders of those formal groups in the Bitterroot Valley (as identified above) to solicit nominations of key group members for the student research assistant (McLuskey) to contact and interview. From the responses to that memo, a Bitterroot National Forest staff officer supplied an initial list of names of organizational members involved in formal groups in the Bitterroot Valley as the first interviewees. The interviewees from that list were then asked to recommend other individuals to interview and from that point forward, the sampling method to establish additional key informants was snowball sampling (Miles and Huberman 1994).

Similarly, the staff officer provided the names of the forest planning officers for all seven national forests. Forest planning officers were then contacted by telephone and interviewed. They in turn suggested names of collaborative group members on their forest for additional interviews. Additional interviewees were identified through snowball sampling. All interviewees contacted agreed to be interviewed except for two individuals from the Bitterroot Valley. Both refused on the grounds that they would be repeating their discussions and letters regarding resource issues to various district rangers and Forest Service personnel. All interviewees ranged in age from 35 to 80 years. Most of the interviewees were about 50 years old.

In all, 19 members of formal groups in the Bitterroot Valley (who belonged to 17 various formal groups) were interviewed for Objective 1. Of the 19 Bitterroot interviewees, 12 were male and 7 were female. Two interviewees were also Bitterroot National Forest employees. The groups that these 19 interviewees represented could be broadly characterized as formal community groups that collaborated with various government units or agencies on economic development, political issues, land use planning and property rights, environmental problems, multiple land use advocacy positions, and community social infrastructure development or "spirit". We characterized these collaborative groups as any collection of individuals residing in the geographic region of the Bitterroot Valley who shared the common, stated goal of achieving a regionally or locally based community development or resource management objective and who met on what they considered to be a regular basis.

An additional 7 forest planners and 8 members of collaborative groups with whom the planners consulted on each of the other seven forests in the region were interviewed for Objective 2. Of the 7 planners interviewed on the neighboring forests, 6 were male and 1 was

female. Of the 8 members of collaborative groups on the neighboring forests, 5 were male and 3 were female.

Personal interviews with all key informants in both the Bitterroot Valley and on the other seven national forests were conducted by McLuskey during the study period (September, 1996 through March 1997). All interviews were scheduled ahead of time by phone. The purpose of the study was explained to the potential interviewees and a time and place to meet for the interview was established. Interviews with collaborative group members in both the Bitterroot Valley and on the other seven national forests followed a semistandardized protocol addressing the five criteria of effective public participation, i.e., promoting cooperation; relating management goals to management practices; securing a representative, consultative audience; promoting civil discourse; and adapting communication. For each of these criteria, Richards and McLuskey created a series of specific protocol questions to focus the responses of the interviewees. Interviewees were also asked descriptive questions such as which group(s) they belonged to, goals of the group(s) and structure of the group(s). The semistandardized protocol for the forest planners was similar but less formal. In general, the planner interviews comprised discussions about the history and structure of public involvement on each forest and perceived successes, failures, and new efforts.

In addition to the fixed protocol questions, all interviewees were encouraged to discuss anything they thought was relevant to the interview themes. It was usually in this more informal discussion that interviewees stressed what they perceived to be the most important factors in effective public participation in resource management. In general, interviews lasted approximately one and half hours. To reduce interviewee tension, tape recorders were not

used. Instead, notes were taken during all the interviews and then transcribed in full. From each transcription, a summary of each interview was then compiled .

Several methodological limitations were encountered in obtaining reliable interview data. One was the fact that many interviewees shared overlapping membership in different groups. Although this was helpful in learning about structural and ideological differences and similarities between groups, at times, interviewees would "jump" from discussing one group to another without specifying which group they were referencing. Interviewees would also speak generally from individual beliefs at times, and not from collective group actions or values, so it was difficult to distinguish when comments were from a personal or a group perspective. Despite these limitations, common themes became apparent between and across groups as the interviews progressed.

Data Analysis

Once all the interviews were completed, each interview transcript and summary was reviewed by McLuskey and Richards. Together, we developed "contextualizing strategies" that involved identifying the relationships among the different elements of each transcribed text and comparing them to connect statements and events a coherent whole (Maxwell, 1996; Mishler, 1986). Tables were then made condensing and comparing the interviewees' assessments of the five measurement criteria for effective public participation. Other common themes that emerged from the interviews were recorded and supported with salient quotes from the interviews.

Findings

From the summary of the interviews, various themes emerged that expanded on how the five criteria of effective public participation are best measured or characterized. All the

interviewees noted several common factors that determined whether each criterion was achieved or not.

Criterion 1

For the first criterion,

1. **Promoting cooperation** and clarifying people's realistic and idealized expectations of public participation, particularly in the context of the terms "collaboration" and "consensus".

Bitterroot Valley interviewees noted that ***cooperation and realistic expectations are fostered more in small groups than in large groups***. This was supported by interviewee comments such as:

> *"To get support, the worst way is to hold large meetings and advertise in the newspaper. The most successful way is to concentrate on small groups. Set up small committees and take on small issues in each one with facilitating help."*

> *"More than 24 people in a meeting is ineffective. There's no exchange of ideas except those people who are on a soapbox."*

> *"Small groups are better but less representative. Eight to fifteen people is the ideal size, more than that is way too many."*

> *"Break into small groups of five to ten people, that way people are less likely to yell (grandstand) and more likely to talk."*

> *"Don't give the opponents a stage. Workshops are good. Break people into small working groups."*

Bitterroot interviewees also noted that cooperation and realistic expectations are promoted when ***Forest Service personnel with actual management decision authority join the public in the field where local planning decisions have an impact*** , e.g.,

> *"Higher echelon has to be involved, get their boots muddy. Planners are out in the field all the time, so they know how people feel. Forest Service officials and higher ups don't know how the public feels. They need to get the pulse of how people*

feel."

"Some solutions should be made from local level, not federal. The Forest Service is better off to have more authority at the district ranger level, someone with community credibility."

"There's too much Washington in decision making. Listen to the guy on the ground."

The importance of having those in authority for field-level decisions join the collaborative group was also emphasized by interviewees from groups on other forests:

"The better people in the Forest Service are in the top ranks. They should be at the district ranger level."

Similarly, Bitterroot interviewees claimed that cooperation is enhanced when Forest Service personnel ***encourage opposing groups to talk directly with each other about a common goal rather than serving to negotiate differences between them***. Bitterroot interviewee comments reflected the need to stress collaboration over consensus since securing agreement between opposing groups (consensus) comes at risk of losing group cohesion and purpose (collaboration):

"Opposing sides need to talk to each other, not having the two groups talking to the Forest Service or polarization is the result. There are a lot of issues that can be resolved if people can talk to each other."

"For conflict resolution, you should meet with the opposing group and see if there's any common goal."

"When there's conflict, get every side to listen to each other."

"Have tried bringing opposing sides together but it didn't work because egos got in the way. Many groups are happy having the Forest Service negotiate the middle ground, but then the forest suffers because the Forest Service doesn't have time in the forest. There's still hope. People in groups are starting to get tired of fighting."

The need to focus on common issues and avoid negotiating differences was also noted by several of the forest planners. More specifically, forest planners stressed the need for

agency members to ***not only avoid negotiating differences between participants but avoid directing participants toward common issues as well:***

> *"Get all interests talking, not the Forest Service in the middle. You don't want the Forest Service the "hub." You want the Forest Service and the public on a wheel, all interacting, but the Forest Service will still make scientific and lawful decisions when necessary. Discourse among competing interest groups will make a process effective. Without back and forth dialogue, nothing will progress."*

> *"Getting these people together is good. It's frustrating sometimes, but it shows the sincerity of each position to others with different opinions. This local level collaboration is what will reduce conflict over land use issues. The Forest Service has had to referee in the past and it caused trouble because both the groups would see the Forest Service as holding the other's water. We're trying to get ourselves out of the middle - facilitate, not lead. One of the keys to success is for the agency to step out of the middle so as not to be seen representing the other's side."*

> *"The key to success is not taking a leadership role. We assist and facilitate."*

According to the Bitterroot interviewees, cooperation and realistic expectations are also promoted when ***participants encourage the free expression of all opinions and incorporate these within their discussions and their records***, e.g.,

> *"It's okay if people in committees leave as long as their ideas are captured and incorporated. Give everyone the opportunity to get their thoughts out."*

> *"She was a newcomer to the community when she joined the Water Forum and was relieved it was a consensus group because she know she wasn't as prepared as some people. In those consensus meetings her ideas were all written down an recorded."*

> *"Be sensitive to the fact that some people in meetings aren't speaking. The round table approach works best (each person at the table talks and it keeps going around until everybody passes.}"*

> *"It takes more time working with consensus, but it's a way of reaching a decision with everyone's input and a majority of approval."*

Bitterroot interviewees also noted that cooperation is more likely when participants can ***table those issues for which a resolution cannot be reached and focus on issues that are considered resolvable***. This observation notes that the participation process is member driven

rather than agency led as explained above. Again, Bitterroot interviewee comments reflect the ***need for members to agree to disagree and thereby save collaboration at the expense of consensus***:

> *"Sometimes we work to end controversy, sometimes we can't and we just have to accept that. We have to work for the ones that are solvable."*
>
> *"Issues are tabled when there's disagreement. We agree to disagree, and record the points disagreed on."*
>
> *"We had a resource committee with a diverse membership, and different ideas. There was too much controversy so they dropped the committee. Decisions are made by debating different ideas, if there's no resolution, they're tabled."*
>
> *"Maybe everyone agreeing isn't the goal. Sometimes facilitators want everyone to be happy and maybe that's not the goal. Value issues have to be addressed not put in a bin like some facilitators do."*

Interviewees from collaborative groups on other forests also noted that unresolvable issues should be tabled and members should attend to those issues for which they believe they can attain agreement:

> *"Sometimes you have to agree to disagree. You're not going to agree on certain areas. Find something that everyone can agree on, something really small or general. Look at less important areas, with lower conflict and demonstrate that you can agree on something, anything."*
>
> *"The secret is to work on things that you can reach agreement on first. Later take up things that you can have partial agreement on."*
>
> *"We have some agreement on access, but the big question is whether we can take that tiny agreement and tackle the big issue."*

In addition, Bitterroot interviewees stressed that cooperation is promoted when ***participants recognize the importance of getting to know each other through personal, face-to-face relationships:***

> *"Because of the way culture has developed over the last 20 years, there are little opportunities to contact other members of the community with differing ideas. This*

creates tribal fracturing and people don't figure out common problems. It's important to think about community ties."

"Look for things people have in common, even if they're issues not dealt with in the particular process. Keep people involved in different issues. Then on some they will agree and that will make their disagreements less intense."

"There's a very independent nature about people here. Interdependence will determine success in the future."

"Being a part of the community brings value to his life. It's hard for people to hate me because they know me personally, but people might not like my policies."

Relatedly, several forest planners noted that cooperation is also fostered when participants ***recognize that personalities and informal interactions can override formal roles and processes:***

"Individual rangers determine success, not processes. The Bitterroot National Forest can mimic any successful process, and it could flop because it's the people involved that create successes, not the processes used. Can you substitute people other than rangers who have the interpersonal skill to make a process work?"

"You can't set one model for every situation. You have to tailor your efforts to each community. Success is partly a matter of having the right people in the right place at the right time (including public, Forest Service, other agency members, commissioners.)

Interviewees from collaborative groups on other forests also noted the importance of "people not processes":

"People are the key to any success. Some communities won't work like this because they don't have the excited people."

Finally, Bitterroot interviewees noted that cooperation is more likely when ***participants recruit other members personally:***

"First you call up someone you know, like from civic groups, and ask them to come to meetings."

"Sometimes public involvement means choosing the right people and these people will get the information out to the rest of the public informally."

"You've got to have your finger on who gets things done in the community, go to these people in person - one on one. Meetings don't work. You need to ask in a personal, friendly way. Find the right people who can get others to help - network... Groups that include rebels can't be successful. People in groups can have different ideas, but their primary goal can't be to tear up the process. You have to avoid inviting them. One of the keys to accomplishment is keeping the rebels out."

Relatedly, several forest planners noted that cooperation is more likely to be achieved when

participants capture and foster a sense of community involvement:

"There aren't many forums to get people together to deal with each other. There's not a lot of opportunity."

"A more subtle form of public involvement is to encourage Forest Service personnel to be involved in the community: informed on all issues, all employees have the responsibility to correct neighbors who believe false rumors, participate in community activities - this way, they are all constantly available as a source of information."

Interviewees from collaborative groups on other forests also stressed the importance of Forest Service employees participating not only in the public involvement process but in the community itself to foster cooperation:

"Forest Service employees are no longer faceless bureaucrats. I know them now and have a better understanding of the levels of bureaucracy."

"In many small towns, the Forest Service doesn't associate with the community. Some do here and some don't. I think that the Forest Service being at meetings and in the community clubs helps the relationship. There's better access and better success."

"At first, people were afraid to ask him (a Forest Service employee) questions. Now they realize that he's just a guy. The Forest Service has skills that people ask for."

"(The Forest Service employees') pulling away from the communities is bad. People don't know the ranger anymore. Decisions are removed from the area. People don't know who to contact to get things done."

"(The group) is giving a lot more access and understanding for the community into the federal processes."

"We have been pretty successful. (The group) has accomplished a better understanding of how decisions are interconnected and the relationship between county zoning, planning and affordable housing."

Criterion 2

For the second criterion,

2. **Relating management goals to management practices** on the forest and in local communities and identifying those institutional arrangements that are most effective in implementing land management decisions,

Bitterroot interviewees noted that ***achieving short-term goals in terms of actual practice is essential to maintaining group cohesion and hence the institutional "glue" that holds the group together:***

"Committee members stay on committees because success breeds success."

"Create opportunities for short term successes as well as the long range goals."

"Each little success reduces cynicism so next time people will be more optimistic."

"You have to keep projects going to keep interest. Show success and people will be willing to help. You also need long term successes."

"People need victories. You can't sustain an effort with only defeats, you need to win."

Forest planners also noted that management goals are best met when short-term successes are achieved:

"It's very important that participants see the end results of their work - a final product and how the product is used. This has to be immediate, not in the future."

"If we can build relationships on small issues, and have successes, the groups will develop confidence and maybe tackle big issues."

Interviewees from collaborative groups on other forests also emphasized the importance of achieving short-term goals in producing sustainable cooperation:

"Tiny successes happening regularly is a big deal, although each in itself isn't that important."

"We started with little issues , quick wins, but these were very important for the group. Then we moved on to broader issues. If we had pushed heavy issues at the beginning, it wouldn't have worked. You have to go slow."

"We needed to get little successes behind us."

"We needed to work on public support, but we needed a couple products (successes) to show before that."

In addition, forest planners stressed that ***achieving short-term successes is even more important given the problem of participant burn-out***:

"A big problem is burning the public out. We need to be efficient and use their time effectively."

"These groups are a big time commitment for the public. If we can figure out other ways to get grants it will take the burden off volunteers."

Similarly, interviewees from collaborative groups on other forests cautioned against volunteer burnout:

"It's a lot of work, a big commitment. Some people who can't make it to all the meetings trade off with someone else that represents their interests, like outfitters."

"I haven't attended as many meetings as I would have liked because it takes a lot of time. The time commitment is a serious problem, three to four hours of office time plus committee and research work."

"It takes a lot of time. That's a lot to ask volunteers. I'm in the snowmobile business, so the issues discussed affect my livelihood. I can justify taking the time off work. I wants the subgroups to involve other people than the main group, to take some of the load off them. Then the subgroups can come back and tell the group the decision. I would like to see the group as more of an ending point rather than a working point."

Bitterroot interviewees noted that management goals are more easily related to management practices and institutional ties are more easily maintained when ***participants focus on issues in terms of tangible objectives that are meaningful to them***:

"People won't come to meetings about long range plans, it's more realistic to model public involvement around specific issues. Break it down to issues that affect people directly. Land-use plans, comprehensive plans, long range Forest Service plans: the number of people interested in these broad topics are few and those that do come to meetings on these topics have an agenda on specific issues or a personal philosophy - not for the purpose of the meeting. People are interested in immediate objectives and will participate intensively for a short time."

"No matter what the issue is, it's hard to get people involved. Send out mailings and say, 'this is happening in your backyard'."

The importance of "breaking issues down" into specific, tangible objectives was also noted by the forest planners:

"Tailor presentations to specific communities by using examples from that community. The risk in doing this is alienating people who want the whole picture, not just specific community issues."

"The special interest groups usually try to bring up general issues on specific projects. You have to make them be specific."

"Give the Forest Plan more of a sense of place so people can tell it affects their area."

Similarly, interviewees from collaborative groups on other forests stressed the need to break issues down into tangible goals:

"We look at particular areas, break down the issues."

"One big problem we have is that we're trying to do a lot of broad and nebulous issues and we need a better technique to focus on specific issues."

Criterion 3

Bitterroot interviewees noted that for the third criterion,

3. **Securing a representative, consultative audience** and characterizing how completely valley consensus/collaborative groups represent local, regional, and national attitudes about land management decisions,

participants considered themselves more effective representatives when ***they represent themselves as individuals than when they represent various groups they may belong to. At the same time, participant membership must be seen as open and inclusive:***

> *"We want people as individuals, not as group members. Therefore, they speak without checking with their group."*
>
> *"In small groups, the ground rules are that everybody comes as individuals. You come with the sum total of your life experiences, but you leave them at the door and speak only for yourself. It's important to speak for yourself and let others do that too."*
>
> *"People have to speak for themselves."*
>
> *"They've tried an umbrella group in the Valley, but it didn't work because members had to go back to their other groups and ask permission."*
>
> *"You have to be careful that people don't represent groups. You can be a part of other groups, but in our group, you speak as individuals."*
>
> *"When starting a meeting, the group has to be well representative of the community. You have to be fair. The Forest Service can't pick and choose who the representatives are."*

The importance of representing oneself as an individual during the participation process was also noted by interviewees active in collaboration groups on other forests. Other interviewees, however, cautioned that ***it is not completely possible to unfetter participation from political interests:***

> *"I represent environmentalists loosely. There are certain issues that I can't compromise on because of state and national interests.*
>
> *"Everyone on the group represents a constituency. Some confer with their constituency, like the environmentalist and the outfitters. The grazing people don't as much. I do confer with the property rights, land management, and grazing folks that I represent."*
>
> *"We try not to go in with a position, but try to go in as an individual. There aren't too many people who go in with agendas (but a few)."*

According to interviewees from collaborative groups on other forests, the danger of group versus individual representation in the participation process is in the risk that ***the process can be derailed when outside influences become too politically intrusive:***

> *"One big problem we have is that we're trying to do a lot of broad and nebulous issues and we need a better technique to focus on specific issues. Things come out of Washington and we can't do anything about that. It's disappointing when government's action negates what the group decides."*

> *"If we do things right, without compromising values, politicians can't say no."*

> *"I'm pretty concerned that some people aren't at the table. There are a whole lot of players at either side that aren't at the table. These people could stop the whole process through litigation."*

Striking the balance between individual representation and inclusive membership is the observation from an interviewee in a collaborative group on another forest that ***representativeness is most likely to be achieved when all opinions are incorporated even when they are not necessarily personally represented:***

> *"The key is that you have to have all the stakeholders, then there's a better chance of less appeals."*

While participants may be more effective when they represent themselves as individuals, Bitterroot interviewees also stressed that ***understanding the informal norms of the group's social behavior and its history of interaction is important for participants to function as representative members of the group:***

> *"We loosened up on formal membership. It didn't work well: new people were frustrated with the process because they didn't know the history behind our actions."*

> *"As new people show up at groups, they're not socialized into the group. They don't come as individuals and don't understand the consensus process. They don't know the rules."*

Criterion 4

In terms of the fourth criterion,

4. **Promoting civil discourse** and recognizing the attributes of, and barriers to, effective public participation,

Bitterroot interviewees stressed that ***engaging in personal, one-to-one dialogue with both participants and nonparticipants reduces barriers to effective, civil discourse***:

"Call someone you know, like from a civic club and get them to come to a meeting."

"The most effective way to move someone's opinion is to have them persuaded by someone they trust, but this is tough to do. Policy makers need to get out talking to people a lot, going to their homes, but there isn't time for that. Back and forth dialogue has to happen and it doesn't in formal processes like public meetings."

"Fax and phone members before meetings to get them to come."

"Hope that opinion leaders in the group can influence community about decisions made."

"To resolve conflict, have one-on-one discussions with rangers or resource people, or go out in the field to look at problems. There needs to be an effort for one-on-one discussion.

"Talk to people. You need dialogue if you want people to get involved."

"Go directly to the Forest Service and discuss problems personally."

"Try to deal with individuals. If someone writes a letter about something concerning them, go to their home and visit them. Relationship building, one on one trust and credibility making, helps with controversial things."

"You need to discuss problems, with no personalities involved and then things can be resolved."

"When you receive a call about a problem, call the person back. Respond even if you disagree. You have to listen thoroughly. Lack of response is a problem. The trouble is that you can't get to all the people."

Similarly, the importance of one-on-one dialogue in promoting civil discourse was stressed by several of the forest planners:

> *"On small projects, always contact neighbors by letter or phone. A direct connection to the public is very important."*
>
> *"People don't sue their neighbors that they know."*

Bitterroot interviewees also claimed that ***civil discourse is best promoted through a facilitator***:

> *"In planning, you have to have a good, neutral, and strong facilitator."*
>
> *"The key to success is a strong facilitator. By strong I mean one who encourages people to speak their opinions while ensuring those opinions aren't directed negatively to other individuals. Part of a facilitators strength is that they are viewed as objective and good listeners and they point out common courtesy."*
>
> *"You have a far better chance of success with a facilitator."*
>
> *"You have to have somebody in charge of the room (a facilitator.) Diverse people can work problems out with a strong facilitator.*
>
> *"A facilitator is a good way to open up people to express their feelings and share ideas."*

Interviewees from collaborative groups on other forests also noted the importance of securing a facilitator to promote civil discourse:

> *"The Consensus Council [sic: Montana Consensus Council] came down and facilitated. This was good because you need someone that people don't know, a neutral party so there isn't bias by the public towards them The facilitator structured it and this was very important. We need to have tight facilitation so people in the minority can give input without getting 'beat up on'."*
>
> *"The facilitator is very good. The facilitator can't be someone from the community, or there would be bias. She keeps them doing work."*
>
> *"The facilitator makes it easier for people to talk. It doesn't work when I facilitate because my bias makes it hard to get my opinions out. At the Congress, [recent Forest Congress], the facilitators were key. You could say what you wanted to say and everyone respected you. There was control and no showcasing. People really listened."*

In addition, Bitterroot interviewees noted that civil discourse is limited in that ***extreme positions cannot, and should not, be accommodated:***

"There will always be extreme positions that you can't accommodate."

"Don't put too much stock in accommodating every single concern. Differentiate between people who just want to stall. Nowadays, with litigation so frequent, it almost doesn't matter what group processes you use - you always have to anticipate litigation."

"No matter how far you go in using public involvement, you will still make certain people mad, that's a given. The Forest Service thinks they can head off this opposition by public involvement, but that's unrealistic."

"You can't convince the extremists otherwise, you have to focus on the middle."

Similarly, forest planners noted the need to be realistic and avoid accommodating extreme positions to insure civil discourse:

"Some people go as far as necessary to achieve their agenda (i.e. litigation.) This isn't a failure. The history of public involvement in the Forest Service always involves extremes and polarization. You have to be aware of their position, but recognize that you won't be able to accommodate their polarization."

"The culture in the country has changed to be one of greater contentiousness (more litigation.) You're never going to please everyone."

Criterion 5

For the fifth criterion,

5. **Adapting communication methods to different information needs and perceptions** of those public groups that may participate in forest planning,

Bitterroot interviewees stressed that successful ***communication relies on participants knowing how their input is considered even if their input doesn't produce actual results:***

"People have to see what they're doing has an impact, that people listen to them."

"For the public to be able to participate, they have to know what's going to be done about their ideas. The Forest Service has to know internally what they're going to do with public involvement and tell folks beforehand. They have to make sure they let people know who's calling the shots. The public can't think they are if input really has no effect."

"Somebody is going to be disappointed with the decision no matter what. Policy makers need to explain why the decision was made even though it opposes someone's input."

"The main problem with public involvement in the Valley is that the Forest Service is manipulating the process and not incorporating public opinion. The Forest Service uses public involvement to justify what they've already decided. This leads to less involvement when the public's ideas aren't incorporated."

People feel they can't make a difference. This makes them less involved and concerned. You have to convince people that government will listen before it makes decisions.

This observation was also stressed by several of the forest planners:

"You have to tell the public up-front what the rules, or limits of their involvement is. You don't have the latitude to do whatever the public says, it's not an open check book. You need professionals sometimes. You have to stay between the grounds of law and science, but other than that public involvement is the key."

"You should show where the public's participation goes. You have to give understanding to those who aren't accommodated. In the Forest Plan, we included people's individual responses on specific issues so they could see how their opinions were addressed - the quote from the person, and the answer to it."

"It's very important that the public understands the sideboards (laws that limit decision space.) You have to be up-front and honest about these sideboards. The group has to know that sometimes the answer will be 'no.' The final decision rests with the Forest Service. Groups have to understand and accept that."

Forest planners specifically noted that participants not only need to know how their input will be used but that their ***input will be used consistently throughout the process***:

"You have to ensure that the Forest Service leadership agrees with a project and make sure that the message going out to the public from all Forest Service employees is the same - no different slants. Sometimes silence means disagreement so we deceived ourselves into believing that everyone agreed in the Forest Service. You have to send a cohesive and unified message to the public."

Interviewees from collaborative groups on other forests also emphasized the need for Forest Service participants to receive and process input consistently:

> *"Sometimes different people (from the Forest Service) present the same information at different venues but give different spins on it. They are not consistent, and this has incited feelings of hostility."*

Forest planners claimed that ***involving participants early in the process is critical to successful communication:***

> *"One key that is truly important is that if you truly want to engage folks in a collaborative effort you have to start early so people can catch up with the agency - learning process. Active public participation takes longer because you have to teach the public knowledge necessary for meaningful input."*

> *"You spend a lot of time discussing and understanding others' objectives."*

This observation was confirmed by interviewees from collaborative groups on other forests:

> *"The group is trying to get involved from the beginning, and therefore there will be less fighting at the end. There will be ownership from beginning at the start of the process. People will be more apt to go along with a decision if the group is involved."*

Summary

In summary, all three groups of informants identified common themes that affect the degree to which the five criteria of effective public participation can best be measured or achieved. Many of these themes or factors have been identified in the social science research literature on public participation as reflected in Table 1.

Results from this study as informed by the research literature on public participation indicate that for the first criterion,

1. **Promoting cooperation** and clarifying people's realistic and idealized expectations of public participation, particularly in the context of the terms "collaboration" and "consensus",

"collaboration" is a collective term for various forms of consultative (versus truly cooperative) resource management systems. "Consensus", on the other hand, is less likely to refer to a system of public involvement than it is to a commonly agreed upon goal which collaborative, i.e., cooperative, groups aim to achieve.

For the second criterion,

2. **Relating management goals to management practices** on the forest and in local communities and identifying those institutional arrangements that are most effective in implementing land management decisions,

study findings indicate that management goals can best be met by management practices when agency officials with actual authority to make field-level decisions participate in collaborative group efforts. Otherwise, collaborative participation is likely to fail since the group may accept more responsibility for resource management objectives than it has actual authority to execute. Similarly, institutional arrangements that provide open and inclusive representation by as many key stakeholders as possible provide the strongest support for collaborative participation. Such arrangements appear to depend more on informal and individualized, personal interaction rather than formal processes and constituent representation.

For the third criterion,

3. **Securing a representative, consultative audience** and characterizing how completely valley consensus/collaborative groups represent local, regional, and national attitudes about land management decisions,

findings support the claim that collaborative groups are perceived as representational when they recognize yet minimize external political interests, maintain an open political forum, and engage in frequent one-on-one individual dialogue both within and outside the group.

For the fourth criterion,

4. **Promoting civil discourse** and recognizing the attributes of, and barriers to, effective public participation,

results indicate that civil discourse is more likely to be achieved when a group secures a facilitator to insure that all opinions are freely expressed, recorded, and respected. Insuring that all opinions are voiced freely is likely to build collaborative group trust.

For the last criterion,

5. **Adapting communication methods to different information needs and perceptions** of those public groups that may participate in forest planning,

results support insuring open and consistent communication channels so that all participant feedback and information is disseminated by the group in a similar process.

Using Criteria to Meet Objectives

It has been suggested that the Bitterroot National Forest consider the options of meeting these criteria by a) using existing collaborative groups involved in resource management in the Bitterroot Valley to advise the forest in part or for all of its forest planning effort, b) securing an agreement for an outside group to direct a collaborative group effort for the forest in its forest plan revision, c) creating a unique collaborative group to advise the forest on its forest plan direction, or d) not using a collaborative group model to advise the forest but employing other forms of public involvement for the forest plan effort (BEMRP discussion, 26 June 1996). To fulfill both the BEMRP mission of involving the public in land

management and research projects and the needs of the forest in meeting the five criteria of effective public participation, we established two major project objectives:

Objective 1: Assess the potential of existing collaborative groups involved in resource management in the Bitterroot Valley to provide effective public involvement in the Bitterroot National Forest forest planning effort.

Objective 2: Assess the potential of creating a unique collaborative group to provide effective public involvement to the forest on its forest plan direction.

Using Criteria to Meet Objectives: Findings from Other Forests

Findings from the forest planners and members of other collaborative groups on other forests in the region informed our understanding of which of these two objectives would best meet the five criteria of public participation for the Bitterroot National Forest.

Forest 1

The planner on Forest 1 noted that a decade ago, public participation in the new forest plan was extensive because the public realized the old plan could not sustain the volume of past timber harvests. A new forest plan was developed in the early 1980s that reduced the allowable cut. At that time, public participation was high with several meetings in a community club where the public discussed both the forest plan and community problems. From this participation, the forest received comments and tried to incorporate public input into the plan. However, in later years the agency found that the timber harvests predicted by the plan were not sustainable because of old growth, endangered species, and roadless area

concerns. Public discontent with the plan grew and peaked in 1989 with the decline in the timber industry. The community became polarized and attempts have since been made to develop new approaches to public participation in revising the forest plan. At present, Forest 1 consults with three major collaborative groups.

Collaborative Group 1A has "been around" for three years, is composed of local residents, and has a strong geographical affinity to one area of the forest. According to the planner, Forest 1 consults with Group 1A on this area but not on other areas. Members of Group 1A claim that the original goal of the group was to be temporary brainstorming group to protect the environment and support ecosystem management. Group 1A does not take an advocacy position without complete group consensus. Members consist of 12 core members (including a Forest Service representative) but anywhere from 12 to 300 people may attend meetings. Meetings are held monthly and are open to the public. Core members have recruited other community members personally. Meetings are cochaired with rotating cochairs and have been facilitated by a core member. Since the group formed, they have become a nonprofit organization with a board of directors and various funding sources. The group has focused on "quick wins" such as an ecosystem management center jointly managed by the citizens and the Forest Service and have since moved on to broader issues such as landscape analysis for the area.

Collaborative Group 1B has been in existence for two and a half years, is composed of forest wide occupational members (loggers and contractors), and has no strong geographical focus but rather forest-wide concerns. Forest 1 consults with Group 1B on forest-wide issues. Collaborative Group 1C formed one and a half years ago, is composed of regional and political constituency representatives, and has regional concerns, including the forest. Forest

1 consults with Group 1C on forest-wide issues, particularly as they relate to regional resource concerns.

All of these groups are perceived as useful forms of public participation since common characteristics are shared. These include

- maintaining Forest Service membership,
- avoiding a Forest Service leadership role,
- maintaining high, face-to-face interaction,
- recognizing external political interests,
- encouraging open and inclusive representation, and
- emphasizing small successes.

Forest 1 appears to have been effective in consulting with three very different collaborative groups. Evidence from Forest 1 would support Objective 1, using existing collaborative groups for Bitterroot National Forest planning, but with the caveats described above. Forest 1 appears to be unique in that it consults with three different collaborative group but in a very consistent manner. This consistency seems to be a major factor in accounting for the perceived improved success of public participation in recent years.

Forest 2

The planner on Forest 2 noted the steady decline of the timber and mining industries in the region over the last several decades. Despite a major mill closure and decreased timber harvests, the local population has grown by 7 percent since 1990. The planner believed many of these were retirees who are not dependent on local jobs. At present, Forest 2 consults with Collaborative Group 2A. This is a local group that "has a history of other groups" including wilderness advocates, timber industry retirees, hunting clubs, and other diverse interests. It

has also had local student involvement. The group was formed to send local representatives to a national forest meeting convened in 1995. Six members went to the national meeting and since then the Group 2A has continued to meet, primarily to consult with Forest 2. A Forest Service representative had tried to facilitate but the group is now struggling with "rules of conduct and civility". Objectives of the group have been locally based such as a timber sale proposal for part of the forest and an urban interface project.

Members of Collaborative Group 2A also note that the group is not working well now. Following the national meeting, members were encouraged because opposing sides were talking with each other. However, the group approached a very contentious local roadless issue and it proved too demanding. Group 2A still meets with about 12 to 15 of the 24 members present every time. Members try to represent themselves as individuals. When they arrive at an agreement, they usually take their proposal to the Forest Service as a majority position but with the concerns of others attached. At present, the lack of a facilitator is making it difficult to maintain the group.

The existing collaborative group on Forest 2 is perceived to have been a more ambiguously successful approach to public involvement. Constraints on its success include:

- Lack of a facilitator,
- Difficulty in avoiding extreme positions,
- Need for more small successes.

Opportunities for Group 2A to succeed include:

- Commitment from key core members,
- Open and free expression of all opinions.

Evidence from Forest 2 indicates that fulfilling Objective 2, creating a unique collaborative group for forest planning participation, could be difficult given the experiences described above but not without potential benefits. Forest 2 is unique in that it relies on only one collaborative group, which appears to have difficulty in avoiding extreme positions and is disadvantaged because of the lack of a facilitator.

Forest 3

The planner on Forest 3 noted that public participation has been approached through very formal institutional arrangements. Forest 3 is currently a member of a county-level Memorandum of Understanding, henceforth MOU 3A. MOU 3A is comprised of all the state and federal agencies with jurisdiction within the county and is led by an interagency steering group. MOU 3A meets monthly to discuss county wide issues and aims to direct agencies toward identifying areas of priority. The steering group in turn is informed by an MOU 3A task force that is composed of field-level agency managers. The goal of the task force is to initiate public involvement, identify emphases for priority areas, and provide direction for the interdisciplinary team, the third level of MOU 3A. The interdisciplinary team is comprised of agency specialists who actually do the technical work identified by the managers' task force. According to the planner, the MOU 3A provides input to the forest plan and identifies opportunities for forest plan projects. MOU 3A has been successful because goals of all the agencies have been addressed and coordination has improved.

One outcome of MOU 3A has been a collaborative group. About three years ago, the steering committee sponsored a public workshop and asked if anyone would be interested in forming a citizen's planning group. The result was Collaborative Group 3B. Group 3B identifies planning issues within the county and has developed a county vision which the

Forest Service is using as its desired future condition. In addition, Group 3B examines specific resource issues such as recreation use. In addition to Group 3B, a third group, Collaborative Group 3C, began to consult last year with several agencies on a large landscape analysis project in the region. Group 3C has formed action groups that have been facilitated by a University of Montana professor. Group 3C is unique in that it examines one resource in the landscape, e.g., vegetation, at a time and then holds public workshops to discuss that resource. The Forest Service consults with Group 3C to "move forward with the forest plan validation process." The planner emphasized that consultation with MOU 3A and Groups 3B and 3C have been successful because members have been engaged in participation from the beginning, the Forest Service has avoided a paternalistic leadership role, and extreme positions have been avoided.

Members in Collaborative Group 3B claim that the objective of the group was to inform planning in the county and from that effort, they developed a vision statement for the nearby mountains that they recommended the Forest Service adopt for its forest plan. They believe that meetings are generally productive since they are provided with an opportunity to talk with others with whom they disagree. Group 3B has been assisted by having a facilitator through the Montana Consensus Council in the governor's office. The group consists of about 25 to 27 core members who are primarily commodity or amenity advocates and who meet once a month. Group 3B has two subcommittees, one focused on private lands and timber and mining issues and the other on public lands and fire prevention, wildlife, and economic development concerns. Other members of Group 3B have focused on affordable housing issues. Most of the work of Group 3B is conducted at the subcommittee level which is then reported to the main group. A Forest Service representative attends all meetings. Recently,

Group 3B members appear to be more willing to engage in direct personal interaction with Forest Service representatives. Group 3B tries to bring in guest speakers and obtain data. Some interest groups won't attend Group 3B because they believe they will be coerced into compromising on something to which they can't agree. Meetings are announced through a press release as well as mailing to those who attended the first meeting. Some members claim that Group 3B has been successful because it has

- Focused on issues on which agreement can be reached,
- Later initiated issues on which partial agreement can be reached,
- Talked about members' interests and avoided positions on solutions to issues,
- Maintained a regular facilitator,
- Provided input before the forest plan was developed,
- Encouraged free expression on alternatives with no criticism.

Other members have noted constraints on Group 3B's success:

- Poor geographic representation of the county that has limited it primarily to one community,
- Poor representation of women,
- Burdensome time demands on members in doing both main group and subcommittee work,
- Disproportionate commodity over amenity representation,
- Lack of MOU 3A steering committee involvement and the resulting distant implementation decision authority,
- Lack of a process to replace members when they leave.

- Lack of control over external political influences in implementing decisions,
- Disappointments when agencies "negate" what Group 3B decides.

Evidence from Forest 3 indicates strong support for Objective 2, developing a unique collaborative group for the Bitterroot National Forest plan. Forest 3 is unique in that it has a very formal public participation structure as well as an informal collaborative group consultative system. The need for linkages between the two are recognized by participants. Forest 3 is also unique in that Group 3B has a county-level, multi-issue, political focus rather than a resource or economic issue, community "place", or forest management concern. It appears to have addressed this focus productively through the subcommittee structure although with some risk of volunteer burnout.

Forests 4 and 5

Only the planners on Forests 4 and 5 were interviewed because of weather conditions and the resulting lack of time. The planners on Forest 4 noted that public participation on the forest has been directed by a professor from Oregon State University who has "set up" a collaborative learning process. At the present, this collaborative learning process has been directed at the project level, e.g., timber sales, and at the regional level, e.g., the environmental assessments for the Columbia River Basin EIS project. The planners on Forest 4 believe that the expectations for the public to become involved at the project level are too high since there are too many projects for adequate participation. In addition, Forest 4 is confronted with distinct rural and urban populations who have difficulty agreeing on resource issues. Collaboration is necessary so that these groups can begin discussing issues and reducing their polarization. The planners emphasized that as collaboration occurs, the Forest Service must be a participant without relinquishing its leadership role. Both perceived the

district ranger as the key participant and noted that individual rangers, not participation processes, determined the success of public participation.

While they do not yet meet with any collaborative groups, the planners on Forest 4 do consult with county commissioners since they are public representatives. They have also participated in a 3-forest, 2-day open forum to present the region as a connected system to the public. This "Three Forest Effort" or TFE 4A is in the beginning stages of becoming a collaborative process as initiated by the Forest Service. The TFE 4A process is presently aimed at local communities in three rural counties with commodity based economies. The dilemma now is how to incorporate the urban residents who recreate in the three forest area but are presently uninvolved in the TFE 4A effort. The primary barrier for the TFE 4A is to develop a discourse between competing interest groups in an effective process led by district rangers. Both planners believe that more than one collaborative group needs to be active in the whole TFE 4A effort.

The planner on Forest 5 noted that in the mid 1980s about $3 to $4 million was spent on developing forest plans and the agency suffered criticism because the plans were appealed despite all the money and effort. The planner noted that nonetheless a forest plan was in place on all the national forests and they were all working in one way or another. The problem for planners is that special interest groups tend to try to make general issues out of specific ones. In developing the Forest 5 plan, he sent out 2,600 letters and received about 600 responses. In the plan, those 600 individual responses on specific issues were addressed and included so people could see how their opinions were used.

At present, Forest 5 holds "open houses" in local communities to give information to the public. The open house focus is on specific issues. In addition, on small projects, local

residents are contacted by letters or phone or through ads in the local paper and public interest articles. Like the planners on Forest 4, the Forest 5 planner emphasized that the ranger district offices were key to successful open houses and personal contacts. He also noted that it was critical for Forest Service employees to "be good neighbors" and go to community meetings and interact since most input comes from a few people. At present, Forest 5 is not consulting with any particular collaborative groups but instead deal with more national organizations like Trout Unlimited or the National Wildlife Federation.

The evidence from Forests 4 and 5 weakly support Objective 1, using existing collaborative groups for the Bitterroot National Forest plan. Forest 4 is unique in that it is part of a 3-forest system that currently lacks active collaborative groups but is seeking to develop them. Forest 5 is unique in that it currently actively consults at both the local level through personal, district-level interaction and at the national level through representative consultation at the forest level. This strategy appears to be successful on Forest 5 and may also be a potential model for the Bitterroot National Forest.

Conclusion

Findings from the interviews with active participants of collaborative groups in the Bitterroot Valley support many of the observations from other forests as shown in Table 2. From Table 2, common factors that were emphasized in achieving collaborative group success were:

- Securing a facilitator to "nurture" the collaborative group process,
- Insuring early participation by members in collaborative group formation,
- Finding common issues and avoiding extreme positions,

- Encouraging individual representation while emphasizing the general public's rather than special interest group concerns,
- Insuring that field-level agency representatives with actual authority for project decisions join and participate in the group and assume responsibility for implementation of group project decisions,
- Using local media and word of mouth interaction,
- Focusing on concrete goals and achieving "small successes",
- Insuring community involvement and diverse membership,
- Focusing on issues and not personalities,
- Providing short and simple information that can be easily understood by the general public.

Because of the number and diversity of existing groups in the Bitterroot Valley, it would appear difficult to achieve all the criteria for effective public participation in the forest plan revision effort by relying solely on existing collaborative groups in the valley. From the findings in this study, we believe that those forests in the region that have been most successful in their approaches to public participation have worked closely with emerging collaborative groups and insured Forest Service representation at regular group meetings. We are somewhat surprised at the range of goals and diverse memberships of many of these collaborative groups and conclude that indeed there is no one "recipe" for public involvement success. However, the various factors have emerged as determinants of collaborative group effectiveness are consistent across groups.

Since stakeholder involvement in public resource management in the United States occurs through a primarily representational system, individualist public forms of participation

are typical of collaborative planning efforts. As noted earlier, how effective individual citizens are in such decision-making depends on their ability to reach consensus or "speak in one voice" (McKay and Jentoft 1996). Hence, collaboration is only a process towards the goal, which is consensus. However, collaboration does not insure consensus, particularly since public participation forums in this country are consultative in both authority and responsibility (Fiorino 1990, McKay and Jentoft 1996).

In a collaborative group, public and private members voluntarily promote individual and collective actions that together will sustain larger ecosystems (Williams and Eleffson 1997). Such groups are primarily advisory, have no decision-making authority, and vary enormously in size, longevity, membership, and other factors. Most collaborative groups are formal because people wish to cooperate, or avoid conflict, in directing the outcomes of resource management on public lands in which they share a common interest. Since one of the advantages of collaborative groups is that they offer a more regionally or ecosystem-based institutional mechanism for providing stakeholder input into agency resource management decisions, regional systems offer a compromise between the power of centralized government and the needs of decentralized, local stakeholder groups (McKay and Jentoft 1996). Voluntary, collaborative groups offer the possibilities of reducing value conflicts between environmental and property rights advocates, achieving a more efficient economy of scale for forest management, and improving forest health through ecosystem management (Luloff et al. 1996). While collaborative groups may be effective in actually making land management decisions, they may also be successful in securing a greater number of people involved in decisions and in meeting legal mandates for those decisions (Carpenter 1995).

Given the policy context in which collaborative planning functions, we would therefore recommend that the Bitterroot National Forest encourage collaborative group formation process in its forest plan revision efforts by

1. Attending meetings and engaging in one-on-one dialogue with members of existing groups in the Bitterroot Valley to identify common issues and short-term achievable goals that might be addressed in the forest plan revision process;
2. Encourage collaborative group formation by recruiting as many members of the public as possible and using local media for open invitations to public forums at the district level for public input;
3. Disseminate public input both through local media and personal contact with group members and how insure that participants understand how their opinions might be used in the forest plan revision,
4. Avoid forcing the creation of a collaborative group but insure that a district-level Forest Service representative with decision-making authority join sany resulting group(s) that continue to address forest plan and community issues related to forest planning,
5. Simultaneously seek out all opportunities to connect forest plan "vision" needs with existing public involvement efforts to address commonly recognized, critical community planning issues in the Bitterroot Valley.

While these guidelines are extremely general, they are well supported by the findings from this investigation. Clearly, the route to Objective 1, creating a unique collaborative group, is through Objective 2, using existing groups in the valley. However, that route must be expanded through personal interaction, localized by holding open community meetings,

and given meaning through common and concrete, achievable goals for collaborative planning to succeed. Most importantly, both the public and the agency need to recognize the limitations of the public participation process along the spectrum of consultative and cooperative management systems. Public input has to be secured early in the forest plan process, consistently processed, and reported back to those who offer it for those limitations to be understood and accepted.

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Table 1. Factors affecting the five criteria of effective public participation.

Criterion	*Characteristics from the Study*	*Characteristics from the Literature*
1. Promoting cooperation and clarifying expectations	• Members should form a small group.	Average group size is 19 members (Williams and Ellefson 1997).
	• USFS members should have actual management decision authority and join other members in the field.	A decisionmaker has a regular presence among members (Shindler and Neburka 1997); Member composition of the group is important (Frentz et al. 1997); The group and its purpose needs to be supported at all levels of the USFS organization (Selin, Schuett and Carr 1997); USFS supervisor commitment for members is critical (Williams and Ellefson 1997); Groups are more effective when decision-makers implement group agreements (Daniels et al. 1993); Decentralized decisions to the local level are ineffective when local responsibility for implementation exceeds local authority to make decisions (Little 1994).
	• Opposing members should talk directly to each other about a common goal and not their differences.	Members identify common interests and goals (Williams and Ellefson 1997); Participants stress improvements rather than solutions and situations rather than problems or conflicts (Krannich et al. 1994); Groups should encourage the formation of a loose consensus identifying concerns but leaving room for minority views (Aronoff and Gunter 1994).
	• USFS members should avoid "managing" or negotiating other members' positions.	Agency (does not) try to control group (Frentz et al. 1997).
	• All members should express their opinions freely and all opinions should be recorded.	Members respect each others' expertise and points of view (Frentz et al. 1997).
	• Members should table unresolvable issues and focus on resolvable objectives.	Conflicting interests and goals of members inhibit effectiveness, especially when members can't agree on mission of the group (Williams and Ellefson 1997).
	Members should develop personal, face-to-face interaction among members.	"Care and feeding" of members is important (Shindler and Neburka 1997).

Criterion	*Characteristics from the Study*	*Characteristics from the Literature*
1. Promoting cooperation and clarifying expectations (continued)	• Members should recognize that personalities and interactions are more important dynamics than formal rules and processes.	Members recognize the important getting to know "the other side" (Schindler and Neburka 1997); Personalities and interaction outside the group are not as critical as an "informal and open structure" (Williams and Ellefson 1997); Groups with "champions" or leaders who spur formation and continued operation are more effective (Williams and Ellefson 1997).
	• Members should recruit other members personally.	
	• Members should capture and foster a sense of community involvement.	Participants that develop consensual strategies and propose resolutions broadly acceptable to the community are more effective (Aronoff and Gunter 1994)
2. Relate management goals to management practices and identify institutional arrangements for implementing decisions	• Members should achieve short-term goals in actual practice.	Make sure that goals are "tangible, common, and attainable" (Williams and Ellefson 1997).
	• Members should recognize participant burnout.	Groups use members' time efficiently by timing meetings carefully, following clear agendas and encouraging progress toward agreement (Williams and Ellefson 1997).
	• Members should focus on objectives that are meaningful to them.	Members define their purpose and their "end product" from the beginning (Shindler and Neburka 1997); Management decisions affecting people's lives should be made by the lowest capable social organization (McKay and Jentoft 1996); Interests rather than positions should be discussed (Daniels et al. 1993); Participants should seek desirable and feasible change rather than desired future conditions and encourage systems thinking rather than linear thinking (Krannich et al. 1994).

Criterion	*Characteristics from the Study*	*Characteristics from the Literature*
3. Secure a representative, consultative audience	• Members should serve as individuals rather than as constituents.	Members are perceived as neutral and biased or 'honest brokers' (Frentz et al. 1997).
	• Membership should be perceived as open and inclusive	Groups that include all stakeholders are viewed as more effective (Williams and Ellefson 1997); Voluntary rather than compulsory membership is more effective (Williams and Ellefson 1997); The narrower the definition of stakeholder (interest group), the greater the risk of harming broader social interests (McKay and Jentoft 1996); High stakeholder access to the group increases success (Daniels et al. 1993); Including a wide range of stakeholders decreases the probability that excluded groups will oppose locally negotiated agreements (Aronoff and Gunter 1994).
	• Members should recognize that participation is not divorced from constituent interests.	Members are willing to filter out "noise" from national interest groups (Shindler and Neburka 1997); Members should avoid threats to that may lead them to believe they will lose control of their decision-making power (Williams and Ellefson 1997); Groups that involve stakeholders are vulnerable to being captured by private interests (McKay and Jentoft 1996); User participation contributes to greater legitimacy of the decisions made, which in turn elicits higher compliance (McKay and Jentoft 1996); Local elites may capture both the group's process and benefits (Davis and Bailey 1996); Outside interests may help local participants develop perspective and modify their own concerns (Aronoff and Gunter 1994).
	• Members should consider all opinions even when they are not personally represented by members.	Decisions that heavily depend on local knowledge and local social control are best suited for delegation and decentralization (McKay and Jentoft 1996).

Criterion	*Characteristics from the Study*	*Characteristics from the Literature*
3. Secure a representative, consultative audience (continued)	• Members should be willing to understand group history and norms.	Members are selected for their understanding of the issues and willingness to commit to a group .process (Shindler and Neburka 1997); Participants focus on group progress rather than specific group successes (Krannich et al. 1994).
4. Promote civil discourse and recognize attributes of, and barriers to, effective participation	• Members should engage in one-to-one dialogue with both members and nonmembers.	Members promote full group interaction rather than information sharing and feedback (Shindler and Neburka 1997); Members maintain open communication both within and outside of the group (Williams and Ellefson 1997); Stakeholder value differences are freely explored (Daniels et al. 1993).
	• Members should secure a facilitator for the group • Members should recognize that extreme positions cannot be accommodated	Groups with a facilitator encourage diverse opinions (Williams and Ellefson 1997) Members are not sidetracked by "personal agendas" and avoid politicization (Selin, Schuett and Carr 1997); Organizational mandates and strongly held personal ideologies may limit members' ability to negotiate and compromise (Williams and Ellefson 1997).
5. Adapt communication methods to different information needs and perceptions	• Members should recognize that all input has to be considered.	Members should work with current and reliable information (Shindler and Neburka 1997); Mutual respect for interests and goals of other members is critical (Williams and Ellefson 1997);
	• Members should process all input consistently.	USFS should provide the institutional funding, reward, and policy structure to support the group (Selin, Schuett, and Carr 1997); A lack of funds to organize and hold meetings inhibits effectiveness (Williams and Ellefson 1997); Members should use common terminology and avoid "hidden agendas" (Williams and Ellefson 1997); Stakeholders should willingly share all information (Daniels et al. 1993).

Criterion	*Characteristics from the Study*	*Characteristics from the Literature*
5. Adapt communication methods to different information needs and perceptions (continued)	• Members should join the group early in its formation.	All stakeholders should be represented by members from the very beginning (Williams and Ellefson 1997); Groups that become systematically involved early in the management process are more effective in managing a common resource (McKay and Jentoft 1996); Formalized collaborative processes may facilitate the development of consensus because of a close working relationship among a relatively small group of people (Aronoff and Gunter 1994).

Table 2. Measuring Criteria for Public Participation from Bitterroot Valley Interviewees

Interviewee Group(s)	Cooperation	Management Practice	Representation	Civil Discourse	Adapt Communication
#1 BVG1	Formal membership, networks	Creates groups, helps existing groups	Individuals	Facilitation	Local media, public meetings
#2 BVG1, BVG2, BVG3	Formal membership, Input results known	Small groups, Break issues down	Individuals, Incorporate all input if people leave the group	Facilitation, Look for common goals	Local media, Demonstration projects
#3 BVG4, BVG5, BVG6	BVG5 members recruited personally but Forest Service shouldn't do that	Establish rules, Hold regular meetings	Individuals, but need group representatives for general population	Facilitation, Look for common goals, Don't try to please all extremes	Media, newsletters
#4 BVG1, BVG5	Attendance is a problem so volunteers have to police themselves	Facilitation	Individuals	Facilitation, Decisions by consensus so everyone's input is used	Local media, Word of mouth, Workshops
#5 BVG7	Break issues down	Avoid people who detail the process	Danger of interest group representation but not general public	Back away from an issue when it becomes too contentious	Media information in "small packages", Word of mouth
#6 BVG8	To get people involved, show success; keep an agenda	Board of directors make decisions for members	Represent BVG8 not individuals	Listen to both sides and debate the issues but back away from an issue that is too controversial	Local media, Among members, Newsletters
#7 Forest Service	Aim for short term successes, pick issues important to people	Use round table forum so every person states an opinion, Small groups, Facilitation	Foresee opinions not represented in the group	Focus on the topic, not the personality Find things people have in common	Seek opinion leaders to influence the community
#8 BVG1	Each success reduces criticism	Agree on rules, Small groups, Facilitation, Each makes one short statement	Individuals, People in groups are representative of general population	Tag team when facilitator gets worked up or loses neutrality	Media, Telephone trees, Individual letters, Word of mouth

Interviewee Group(s)	Cooperation	Management Practice	Representation	Civil Discourse	Adapt Communication
#9 BVG8	People have short fuses when dealing with neighbors because of philosophical differences	Support projects financially, Focus on the poor, education, and the community	Recognize poverty and antidevelopment interests	Move from being independent to interdependent	Local media
#10 BVG9, BVG10, BVG11	Have good issues to get people involved	BVG9 has monthly meetings and raises funds through raffles, dues BVG10 learns about issues, takes a position, and lobbies BVG11 litigates	BVG9 represents general public, BVG11 has a diverse membership	Avoid conflict through one-on-one discussion	Local media
#11 BVG12, BVG10, BVG13	Talk to people, Have concrete projects, Recognize time is a problem	Write grants, BVG10 learns about issues, decides on actions	BVG12 is community leaders and no newcomers; BVG10 is not representative BVG13 has more extreme members		Newsletters, Talk to groups, Media
#12 BVG14	Invite members, network Show success Have new ideas	Subcommittees are too formalized; Raise funds through grants, donations, community events	Don't include negative people	Get city government participation, Find strong leaders, Different ideas are okay but the goal can't be to tear up the process	Local media
#13 BVG3	Recruit word of mouth, Find an immediate problem	Introduce topic, action alert Write letters or call politicians	Find diverse membership	Work with other groups through overlapping membership, Facilitation	Go directly to the Forest Service, Newsletters, Use experience
#14 BVG15, BVG16	Find an urgent problem, Motivate victories	Litigate appeals, Raise money locally, Write grants	Find diverse members with common goal	Meet with opponents and see if there is a common goals	Write articles, Educate

Interviewee Group(s)	Cooperation	Management Practice	Representation	Civil Discourse	Adapt Communication
#15 Forest Service	Show impacts, effects,	One-on-one dialogue	Deal with special interests, Community leaders can tell you what to expect	Address values, Build relationships, Recognize everyone agreeing is not the goal	Simplify information, Show problems first hand to people
#16 BVG5	Find an issue that motivates people	Write grants, Facilitation, Have everyone speak	Individuals	Reach consensus on decisions	Expert information, workshops
#17 BVG17	Find leaders, Have open meetings	Talk problems possible solutions, Influence voters	Individuals	Avoid personalities and focus on problems	Talk to groups not the media
#18 BVG7	People want to participate	Public meetings, Form new groups, Facilitation	Find "middle of the roaders"	Focus on people in the middle	Keep information short and simple, Show pictures
#19 BVG7	Convince people participation makes a difference	Separate groups with separate issues, Go to groups and listen to their priorities	Recognize it is hard to get general public to public meetings, Easy to get the same people all the time	Make decisions by consensus, When have a conflict, get all sides to listen, Talk to people	Public notices, Media